

# **EPA Atlas Asbestos Mine Superfund Site**

## **U.S. EPA TO CONDUCT RISK ASSESSMENT AT CLEAR CREEK MANAGEMENT AREA**

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) will conduct a risk assessment of the Clear Creek Management Study Area (CCMA). This fact sheet addresses what will happen in August 2004 when the U.S. EPA will engage in a preliminary data collection, and in October 2004 when we will conduct full-scale data collection. This fact sheet also explains what will be done with the completed report.

The CCMA is a 48-square-mile area that is part of the Atlas Asbestos Mine Superfund Site (see Figure 1). Both the CCMA and the mine site are located on a formation of naturally occurring serpentine rock and soil which contain high concentrations of naturally occurring asbestos (NOA). (See page 2 for a brief description of NOA to better understand this mineral and how it can affect people's health.) There are over 86 abandoned mines (mercury, chromium and asbestos) in the CCMA and surrounding areas of the New Idria/Coalinga Region.

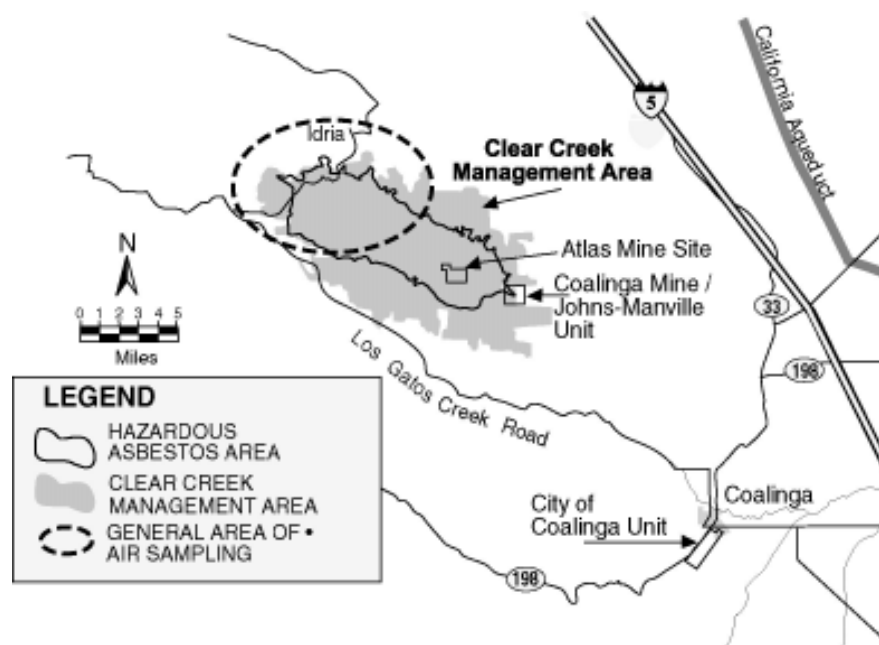
The CCMA is managed by the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (U.S. BLM). The naturally barren slopes, bald ridges, network of bulldozed mining trails and isolated location makes the CCMA a challenging riding experience for off-road motorcyclists. Many families with children camp in the area, which also is used by rock collectors, hikers and hunters.

### **Why Are We Doing a Risk Assessment and What Will be Done With the Report?**

The Atlas Asbestos Mine Site has been remediated to ensure that asbestos associated with its mining activities is not released to surrounding areas, including the CCMA. However, the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Atlas Asbestos Mine Superfund Site requires that U.S. EPA also assess the risk of NOA to recreational users of the CCMA. Therefore,

the U.S. EPA will measure the amount of NOA fibers in the personal air space by conducting typical recreational activities in the CCMA while using up-to-date test equipment and methodology. Depending on the study's findings, the Site may be considered for deletion from the U.S. EPA National Priorities List (NPL). The NPL or Superfund, is a list of the most hazardous waste sites in the nation. When a site is deleted from the NPL, it means that the Record of Decision has been fulfilled and the cleanup has been implemented and is functioning as designed.

When the risk assessment is complete, the air sampling results will become part of a report that will be entered into the Site's Administrative Record. The U.S. EPA will



*Figure 1: Atlas Asbestos Mine Superfund Site*

also produce and distribute a fact sheet summarizing the results of the risk assessment. The full report and fact sheet will also be available in information repositories for public review. The risk assessment report will be shared with U.S. BLM for the purpose of developing management strategies for the CCMA that will minimize human health risk to users and maintenance workers.

## **What Will Happen When We Gather Data in August and October 2004?**

The U.S. EPA is coordinating with U.S. BLM and California EPA's Department of Toxic Substances Control to develop the air sampling work plan for the sampling events. For the August 2004 event, U.S. EPA staff and contractors will come to the CCMA to collect preliminary data that will be used to fine-tune the main air sampling event planned for October 2004. If you visit the CCMA during either sampling events, you will see staff dressed in white overalls with respirators placed over their mouth and nose. This personal protective equipment is required by federal and state regulations for workers exposed to potentially hazardous materials. In addition, you will see staff wearing equipment used to gather personal breathing space air samples. This equipment includes an air pump device attached to the hip and a filter cassette attached to the chest (see Figure 2).

In August, the crew will conduct a few activities such as motorcycle riding to calibrate the equipment so that it will be set correctly for the October sampling. They also will select final sampling locations for the October sampling event. The data gathered in August will make the October event run more smoothly and produce more accurate measurements.

## **What is Naturally Occurring Asbestos in California?**

Asbestos minerals occur in rock and soil as the result of natural geologic processes, often in veins near earthquake faults in the coastal ranges and the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains and other areas of California. Naturally occurring asbestos (NOA) takes the form of long, thin, flexible, separable fibers. Natural weathering or human disturbance can break NOA down to microscopic fibers that are easily suspended in air. When inhaled, these long, thin fibers irritate tissues and resist the body's natural defenses.

Asbestos is a term used for a group of silicate minerals that occur as asbestiform fibers. They have high tensile strength, flexibility, and heat and chemical resistance. Asbestos minerals belong to either the serpentine mineral group or the amphibole mineral group. The most common type of asbestos found in California is chrysotile, a serpentine mineral. In fact the California state rock is serpentine, a testament to how common it is to find it in the state's geologic formations. Other types of asbestos include tremolite and actinolite, which are amphibole minerals. Tremolite can occur in a variety of crystal shapes and sometimes occur as asbestiform fibers.

Although it is present in at least 42 of California's 58 counties, naturally occurring asbestos can be found most abundantly in and around Humboldt County, in areas of San Benito and Monterey counties, and in western El Dorado County. U.S. EPA's Pacific Southwest Region has a long history of involvement in assessing and minimizing the risk from asbestos in California, including Alameda, Calaveras, Fresno, Los Angeles, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Benito and San Mateo counties.

The World Health Organization, the federal Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. EPA have determined that asbestos is a human carcinogen. Scientists do not yet know with certainty how much exposure to asbestos can result in a person developing asbestos-related disease, but scientists do know that long-term exposure to relatively high concentrations of airborne asbestos is a potent cause of disease. Therefore, it is prudent to reduce environmental exposures whenever possible.

Exposure to asbestos can cause an illness known as asbestosis, as well as lung cancer and a rare cancer of the lining of the lungs called mesothelioma. Exposure occurs when asbestos fibers are inhaled, but the effects from exposure may not be seen for 20 to 50 years. Cigarette smoke and asbestos together significantly increase the chances of getting lung cancer. Therefore, persons who have been exposed to asbestos should not smoke.

Asbestos fibers in rock can become airborne and, therefore, are a potential health risk when disturbed. Scientists are still studying how much asbestos in rock or soil becomes airborne when disturbed.

During the October 2004 air sampling event, you will see about a dozen U.S. EPA and U.S. BLM staff and contractors outfitted in white overalls, respirators and testing equipment. This sampling event will include, but is not limited to, activities such as motorcycle riding, riding in 4-wheel drive vehicles, hiking, camping and engaging in maintenance work.

## Clear Creek Management Area Site Background

The CCMA is one of the largest naturally-occurring asbestos deposits in the world. Most of the CCMA area is designated an asbestos hazard area and warning signs are posted at entry points and on bulletin boards. Rand McNally has incorporated an asbestos hazard warning in their road atlas. Nonetheless, off-highway vehicle recreation and racing have been allowed in parts of the CCMA for many years.

Recently, the U.S. EPA, with U.S. BLM, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry and the California Department of Health Services-Environmental Health Investigations Branch developed and published a pamphlet specifically for visitors at the CCMA. The pamphlet describes asbestos, why it is at the CCMA, how it enters the environment and affects your health, and describes precautions to take when visiting and leaving the CCMA. This pamphlet was developed to address the U.S. EPA's concern that the casual visitor to the CCMA may not receive an adequate and clear warning of the cancer risks associated with inhalation of asbestos fibers. To obtain a copy of this pamphlet, please call (831) 630-5000. The pamphlet includes a hotline number, (831) 630-5060, which plays a daily recorded message that gives callers the concentration of airborne asbestos at the CCMA and the weather conditions. For further specific information regarding the CCMA, contact Robert Beehler, Field Area Manager with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, at (831) 630-5010.

## MAILING LIST

If you would like to be included on the mailing list to receive future mailings about the Atlas Asbestos Mine Superfund Site, please send or call in your request to Jacqueline Lane. See back page for contact information.

## SITE INFORMATION REPOSITORIES

The EPA maintains Site information repositories at the locations listed below. These Site repositories contain project documents, fact sheets and other reference materials for the Site.

### Coalinga District Library

305 N. 4th Street  
Coalinga, CA 93210  
(559) 935-1676  
Hours: Mon.-Thurs., 10 a.m.-8 p.m.

### Huron City Hall

36311 Lassen Avenue  
Huron, CA 93234  
(559) 945-2241  
Hours: Mon.-Fri., 8 a.m.-5p.m.

### Kings County Library

Hansford Branch  
401 North Douty  
Hanford, CA 93230  
(559) 582-0261  
Hours: Mon., Tues.& Wed., 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
Thurs., 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
Fri. & Sat., 12 to 5 p.m.



*Figure 2: Worker wearing personal protective equipment*

# Atlas Asbestos Mine - CCMA Air Sampling

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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You may leave a message on EPA's toll-free Information Line: (800) 231-3075 and we will return your call.

Information about the Superfund program is available on the Internet at:  
<http://yosemite.epa.gov/r9/sfund>.

Region 9 Web site: <http://yosemite.epa.gov/r9/sfund/overview.nsf>

